

Flying Free Podcast



Episode 33

Busting Myths About Singleness After Divorce

Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of Flyingfreenow.com, and you're listening to the Flying Free Podcast, a support resource for women of faith looking for hope and healing from hidden emotional and spiritual abuse.

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 33 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today I am excited to introduce you to a writer who is in the middle of working on a book called *Life-Saving Divorce*. Her name is Gretchen Baskerville. This book is not released yet; it's coming out in early 2020. Gretchen recently did a workshop with the Flying Free Membership Group where she talked about a ninety-day escape plan. It was excellent! I asked her to come back and talk about the subject of singleness because I found out during that workshop that she had been divorced and then stayed single for twenty years prior to getting remarried again. It was fascinating to hear her talk about her single years as being such a blessing and a time of great growth and thriving. I thought, "Wow! There are many women who are getting divorced or already divorced who I think could benefit from hearing her perspective on singleness, some of the things she did, and some of the mind shifts she made that brought her to that place of thriving. Welcome, Gretchen, to the Flying Free Podcast.

GRETCHEN: Thank you, Natalie. I'm glad to be interviewed and glad to talk about this topic.

NATALIE: Let's dive in. I'm wondering when you first got divorced if you thought you would be single for that long? You were pretty young when you got divorced.

GRETCHEN: Right. I'll be honest. If you had told me back when I was 35 years old when I filed for divorce that I would be single for three years, I might not have filed. If you told me I'd be single for five years, I'd have been curled up on the floor in a fetal position stuck there.

NATALIE: Yes, I think a lot of women can relate to that, for sure.

GRETCHEN: In my Christian upbringing, going to a conservative church all my life from infancy, the idea of not being married was unfathomable. I had done everything right. I truly loved God. I loved the Bible. As a kid, I was in youth choir, Christian club at the public high school,

and all my closest friends were Christians. My parents were genuine believers. I met a guy in my church singles group. We did all the things the formulas say we should do: my boyfriend asked my dad if we could date, I was a virgin when I married – the whole bit. I had all these messages. Everything in my life was centered around getting married, being married, being a wife and mother, which was great. But that doesn't work so well when you go through a divorce. I would say that I was numb for the first six months. I just lay in bed and read books. I did have a little home-based business, so I did have to get things done, but I was on autopilot crying at my computer. The woman who came in part time to help me would pat me on the shoulder and I would keep crying. But my kids were preschool age, and I just had very little emotional strength to give. The poor things would follow me from room to room. I loved them so much, but I was really exhausted and was just hanging on to Jesus for dear life. For the first year, I had all the fears that everyone else has, all these lies that get into your mind and engulf you – the black cloud over your head, the red "D" for divorce on my forehead, I'm a failed Christian, nothing good will ever happen to me, my kids will be emotional basket cases and juvenile delinquents. Frankly, people like to threaten you with that. (By the way, that's complete wrong, but we'll get to that.) I felt like I had missed God's plan A and B, and I was somewhere near plan ZZ. I just felt like a total failure. It took me to the end of my first year to be able to smile and to be able to have a good belly laugh once in a while. At the two-year mark, I felt like I was turning a corner and that everything would eventually be okay. I was starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel. It took me about three years to get back to at least emotional normal. I found this Bible verse that has become what I call my divorce verse. It's Psalm 71:20-21. It is the Psalmist speaking to God. "You have made me endure many terrible troubles. You restore me to life again. You bring me back from the depths of the earth. You comfort me and make me greater than ever." I thought, "No way! There's no way God could make me greater than ever. I've lost everything." It turns out that God did make me greater than ever. That sounds a little ...

NATALIE: No, I get what you're saying.

GRETCHEN: Okay. I just don't want that taken wrong. I felt, somewhere in the middle of year two or three, like God was calling me to something different. I have no criticism whatsoever for women who remarry right away. If God drops someone in your life – go for it! But after a few years, I felt like God was calling me to stay single until my youngest child (and my children were preschoolers at the time) grew up and went to college. I called this the fifteen-year plan. I felt that my kids were the victims of a situation that they didn't cause, and I owed it to them to put them first. Like I said, I don't recommend this for everyone, but for me it was just right. I did finally remarry. I am super happily remarried twenty years later. My kids are adults with lives of their own, and they fully embraced my new husband. I mean, not as a dad. They didn't need a dad as they were in their mid-twenties. But they welcome him as a great addition to our little, happy family of three. So, no, I never expected this, but it's really worked out well for me.

NATALIE: What were some of the benefits to being single? That's a long time to be single. How did you look at that in a positive light? When you look back at it, what are some things that you think, "I'm really glad that happened"?

GRETCHEN: Wow! Right off the top of my head, amazing spiritual growth and amazing emotional growth. I have people who are shocked and horrified that someone nice, smart, emotionally stable, attractive, and physically fit (though I'm not right now) could be single for twenty years. I had people actually asking me, "Why aren't you remarried?" For some people, they can't even imagine telling their friends they aren't dating anyone. It seems like in my mind at that time, their thought was if you don't have a man then you are nothing. That was one of the

first myths I had to dump. I know a woman who was dating a known cheater who told me she would rather die than be single as long as I was. I just laughed at the irony that she'd rather be with a known adulterer. Please, have some self-respect.

NATALIE: Yeah.

GRETCHEN: But I get it. As devout Christians we are taught that you would be lonely and pathetic if we weren't remarried or at least a couple. You asked me what I've learned. Myth number one is that you are nothing without a husband, and you have no identity without a man. We know there are plenty of women in the Bible who are heroines in their own right - Ruth, Deborah, Abigail, Dorcas, and the midwives in the story of Moses. I read a ton of single woman missionary biographies, so I knew that single women could change the world. I met a lot of women raising kids by themselves who had inspiring and amazing strength and courage (and I have to say this quietly) that I didn't normally see in married women. So I found a lot of inspiration from these women who had been single for a while. Myth two was that women friends are just place-keepers until you find a man - that women friends just really aren't that valuable. Boy, what an idiot I was. I was so wrong about that. In my Sunday School class I met a woman who was raising four kids by herself with no child support. I was absolutely in awe of her. Sure, it was incredibly difficult for them. They had an old clunker car and a shabby little apartment for five people, but they were a loving family. She and I got to be best friends. Every Saturday we would walk together for an hour on the beach. She was an introvert; I was an extrovert. We made sure that each of us had thirty minutes to talk about our lives.

NATALIE: Smart and sweet.

GRETCHEN: It was absolutely wonderful. We prayed for each other and uplifted each other to the LORD. Together we started a group for other single mothers at our church. This small group was unbelievable! I have never seen so many strong, courageous women knocking it out of the ballpark every day. We had teachers, a swim coach, a small business owner, a childcare provider, a paralegal, a homeschool mother, a manicurist, and a woman who was completely disabled. She couldn't get a job; she couldn't work. This became like a proud survivor group. We were our own community. We were heroines to each other. So we shared our hope and experience with each other. We prayed for each other. Sometimes we helped each other financially. When you do that every week for years, I realized that was the best Bible study or Sunday School class I had ever been in. There was so much emotional closeness and caring. People would come to our group and cry for the first three weeks. Then they would sense God's presence, and they would start to feel that hope and faith. Slowly, the strength and courage would build up.

NATALIE: That's beautiful.

GRETCHEN: It was so amazing to me. It was something I never expected I would find. There really is a different dynamic with women friends because there is no sexuality to cover over the little slights. We have to put in effort in order to keep our women friends. We have to learn to behave well. We get a good glimpse of what we're really like inside. We have to learn to take turns paying for coffee. We have to hold up our end of the friendship. Again, there's not any of that covert sexuality to kind of gloss things over. Our relationships really do have to be good to be good. You don't get that in marriage. It forces you to be a better person. As you can imagine, once I started dating again, I compared all the men to my close girlfriends. It is super easy to identify and ditch the losers because they don't hold a candle to your closest friends.

You sense the lack of authenticity and the lack of integrity within the first two dates, and they are gone. So the power of female friendships was amazing. I also realized that I needed a lot of friends. I needed friends who were interested in the same things I was. I needed someone who loved photography. I needed friends who loved business because my little home-based business started growing. I needed someone who really loved books and fiction like I did to talk through my ideas. To ask one human being to be all of that to us is really putting too much pressure on one person. We would laugh if a woman said, "Well, my mother meets all my emotional needs." We would think she was sick and that something was wrong with her. Yet, we routinely tell ourselves that a husband has to meet all of those needs. It is unrealistic, and we set ourselves up for failure. That was one of the myths that I blew through after a few years. Myth three is about what a woman's job is. I kept telling myself early in my divorce, "It's not a woman's job to fix the plumbing and the car, do outdoorsy stuff, or plan vacations." I felt a combination of helplessness, a feeling of needing to be rescued, and defiant that "this is not a woman's job." But it's amazing. I finally watched a ton of YouTube videos and learned how to do basic home and car repairs.

NATALIE: That's great!

GRETCHEN: The first time you do your first plumbing repair – you watch the YouTube video ten times. Then you say, "I think I can do this." The first time you do your first plumbing repair you say, "I am awesome! I can do this! I'm on the top of the world."

NATALIE: Okay, I have to break in here and say, when I was in my single years the washing machine broke. I did what you did. I Googled it and figured out what it was, and I even figured out what part needed to be replaced. Then I went to look for that part online and was going to buy it. I had seen my ex-husband do this over and over again so I knew that anyone could do this. I was not stupid, so I could figure it out. Then when I found the part, I started watching what other people said on forums. It started getting really convoluted and complicated. After spending a whole day trying to figure it out before I actually took the machine apart, I decided at the last minute that I couldn't do it. So I actually did the opposite of you and called a repair person even though I couldn't afford to pay for it to be repaired. I thought, "I can't afford to NOT have it repaired because I know I will mess this up." It can go both ways. If you are a listener and you try this, it's okay if you are like Gretchen and you succeed. Actually, I have to say there were some things that I did succeed at, but the plumbing thing was just overwhelming. I had visions of water going all over the place. But I am so proud of you, Gretchen, and I know that other women have done that.

GRETCHEN: You bring up a great point. One of the benefits of watching all the YouTube videos and looking at stuff online is realizing when you are in over your head. "I'm not going to be able to crawl under my car and do that." But it gives you the phrases, words, and descriptions of the parts so that when you go talk to the mechanic you can say, "I think it's this," or "I'm hearing this kind of sound. I'm not really sure what it is." At least you sound more intelligent.

NATALIE: Right. That's true. I was able to talk to the guy who ended up coming in, and he told me that I did get it right. What I thought was wrong with it was wrong, and it was the correct part. I probably could have done it, but I just didn't have enough confidence. But I did experience some of what you did as far as a pride in that I was able to learn. I'm not dumb. And it's okay to have brought someone else in. There was a sense of feeling like I was going to survive.

GRETCHEN: Yeah. You just develop a sense of respect for yourself when you take a little bit of time to get educated instead of feeling helpless and throwing up your hands and saying, "Someone please rescue me." You may not be able to go from step one to ten to rescue yourself, but even if you can take one or two steps to educate yourself: known what the names of the parts are, be able to describe the sound you are hearing in your car, finding others who have the same problem on forums – it's just great to do. I discovered that my car had a known defect, and when the mechanic told me he had no idea what it was, I said, "Well, that's odd because the 2013 la dee da had a recall on this back in such-and-such a day. Maybe you should look into that." Being better educated is better. Myth four – I hate this one. This is what we keep getting told in church – that marriage is God's best way of maturing a person. Who came up with this?! Another myth created by people who want us to idolize marriage rather than saying, as Jesus and Paul do, that marriage is not any better than singleness. I get that it's not what we feel in our hearts, but you know what I'm saying. It is true that marriage can be a good way of maturing you, provided that you're not married to someone dangerous. But it is certainly not the only way, nor should we believe that all married people are more mature than all single people.

NATALIE: Right.

GRETCHEN: I remember a time when my church was combining marrieds and singles in a small group to discuss the pastor's sermon that week. In the early years, I felt so second class, and I felt so filled with shame to be divorced. I actually felt sort of lucky to be included in a mixed group. But once I got through the hurt and God rebuilt my life, I realized that I was groveling in some misguided sense of unworthiness, and I was worth every bit as much as those married women. In fact, in a lot of ways I was more mature than many of them. So don't tell me that married women are all wonderful and all single women are losers. It's just on a case-by-case basis. Get rid of that myth. This one is going to be controversial. Myth five is that being emotionally close to men is emotional adultery. (If you want to stop me here you can.)

NATALIE: Oh no! Keep going.

GRETCHEN: I think this myth is complete baloney. Let me say right up front – of course there are people you cannot trust. I have met untrustworthy men; I have met untrustworthy women. But in twenty years of having friendships with both married and single men, I was always able to weed out the bad ones, and I never had any trouble with a good ones. It's all based on good boundaries. It has nothing to do with gender and everything to do with character because there are bad women out there too. It's based on character not theology. While most of my intimate friends were women, I did have a lot of male friends too because I worked in a male-dominated industry. I spent a lot of time with men. As long as I was convinced that they were trustworthy, and they proved that to me in every interaction, I was happy to be quite close with them. If one stepped over the line, and from time-to-time in twenty years I got disappointed with perhaps three out of the thirty- or forty-men friends I have. I was in business, so I was meeting with men constantly. I realize if you are a stay-at-home-mom or something you won't have that many male friends, but I did – men that I would see anywhere from every day to three times a year. I probably did have three out of thirty- or forty-men friends who did step over the line, and I immediately distanced myself. A hug that was maybe too long and that was uncomfortable - so sorry, I'm out of there. As long as a man respected my boundaries, I had no trouble getting close with them. I'm so glad I did because I learned that men are like women in a lot of ways. They want trustworthy, authentic, intimate friends too. After fifteen years, I was in a great situation for dating. I had become pretty good at friendship. I knew what a good person looked like and felt like. When I did start dating again, I never had more than two dates with the charming clubber

liar kind because I knew what authentic men really felt like. It wasn't as easy for them to seduce me, manipulate me, and lie to me.

NATALIE: That's so good. We could go down that rabbit trail too. Let's end with what piece of advice would you give to a newly divorced woman who really wants to be married to a good man someday and is kind of struggling what you did when you were first divorced? What would you tell her to give her hope or to give her a new way of looking at the whole situation?

GRETCHEN: Making a list of your priorities would be a good thing. Not everyone wants to remarry right away. I know a lot of women who don't. I was just talking to one last weekend who said, "No, I don't want to remarry." But for those who do, the first thing I would do is to reject myths about "all men want." There are terrible people online who will tell you that there is only one type of woman that all good men want. That is just ridiculous! I found myself trying to twist myself into being someone I am not. You must silence those old messages in your head. I'll give you an example. I come from a car family. I have always loved cars. I cried when my parents sold the first car that I remember from childhood. My father drove sportscars. Not the super expensive ones, but more like the little pocket rockets. So it's natural that I would love sports cars too. My last three cars have been very fun cars. But I know that what people are thinking is, "Good Christian men don't want to see a middle-aged woman like that, and they don't find it to be attractive."

NATALIE: Oh my goodness. Are you serious?

GRETCHEN: "Good Christian men don't like women who are confident drivers." Or they will say, "Good Christian men don't want women who drive a car like that and attract attention to themselves, and no one will love you if you act like this." Boy, I really had to rewire my mind, get rid of that old thinking, and replace it. So my message is, "Be yourself!" I know it's a little cliché, but be yourself. There will be someone out there I think who will really love you.

NATALIE: Yes! And you want them to love you – who you are. If you try to be someone you are not, they might fall in love with someone else – the person that you are pretending to be. (I'm going to use the swearword "badass.") I'm picturing you driving your badass car and being a great driver. Here's the thing. My current husband would call me a badass woman, and he loves me for it. That's one of the reasons why he wanted to spend the rest of his life with me, because he loves who I am, and I get to be exactly who I am. I get to be dorky. I get to be snarky. I am a lot for a lot of people. Some people have said I am too much, but I am not too much for my husband because that's what he wanted, and he loves all of that. If you feel like you are too much, you're too this, or you're too that because your ex-husband said you are too this or too that, that doesn't mean that someone else isn't going to be absolutely crazy about that part of you. I think that last piece of advice, Gretchen, was perfect.

GRETCHEN: I keep telling my husband, "Now I did warn you before I married you that I was feisty." He says, "I love you feisty. But I've always dated feisty women. I love that kind of woman." So those men are out there. They are good men. They are authentic. They are intimate. And they are looking for you.

NATALIE: They are! I love this! This has been very encouraging. Did you do any online dating? (I'm going to open up that can of worms just briefly.) Did you do any of that?

GRETCHEN: Absolutely. I did do some online dating, yes.

NATALIE: Okay. So now that we've opened it, let's talk about it just a bit. What's your thought on that? I think the guy you ended up with you didn't meet online, you met him actually prior, correct?

GRETCHEN: I met him through a business contact. I will say that online dating obviously did not work for me. It did not work for my husband either. He had done some online dating and said it didn't work for him either. He never had a relationship that lasted more than three months. But I have three girlfriends, who've just married in the last three years, who found great guys online. I did not. But they were all over fifty, so we're not talking gorgeous anymore. One was too plump; one was too tall; one had too much baggage; one had a kid on opioids. There is somebody out there who is not worried about your baggage because frankly they've got tons of baggage of their own. While it didn't work for me, I'm not saying it wouldn't work for others.

NATALIE: Right. I also know people in great marriages who met online. I was just curious what your experience was. I didn't think I was ever going to get remarried because I had nine kids, and I was fifty when I got divorced. I thought, "Who's going to want me? Why would anybody in their right mind? And who is out there? Every good guy is already happily married, and the only ones out there right now are all the people like my ex whom I would never want to marry anyway." But I didn't have time to think about it because while I was in the middle of my divorce process, I connected with the man who is now my husband. (On Facebook bizarrely enough.) You could say that's kind of like online dating, I guess.

GRETCHEN: Absolutely.

NATALIE: We just became friends. We became friends during my divorce process. He was very kind and supportive and just a really good friend. Like you were talking about, he was very authentic and very real. Because the divorce process took almost two years, by the time it was over we were crazy in love with each other. He had been single his whole life. The point of my story at the end is to say that it doesn't matter how many kids you have, how old you are, what you look like, what your hobbies are, what your job or lack of job is – there is someone out there. I'm not saying there is this destined person, just that there are tons of human beings out there. It's true that many are dysfunctional, but many of them are good people. Some have never been married; some have been divorced. They are good people, and they are authentic. I believe that if you want to find one, the odds are in your favor that you will. I think one of the key messages I have heard from Gretchen throughout this whole podcast is that she had really good boundaries, and she learned those boundaries through her single years and through her friendships. I think that was an unexpected benefit from your female friends that you learned what really good relationships felt like and what authentic people felt like so that you could tell whether a guy was that kind of person. Then you were smart enough to say, after the first couple of dates, if it was definitely not going to work. No matter how much you wanted to be married, no matter how much you wanted to be in an intimate relationship, it was not worth being with a jerk to get that for you.

GRETCHEN: Right.

NATALIE: So for everyone who is listening, I hope that you too will take good care of yourself, and in doing so you will find what you are looking for. Gretchen, thank you so much for taking the time to be part of this podcast episode. When your book comes out, let's do another interview so we can talk about the subject of Life-Saving Divorce, which is a book written for

people of faith, correct?

GRETCHEN: Absolutely.

NATALIE: I'm excited for that to come out in early 2020. For those of you who are listening, if these topics are ones that interest you, please go over to Apple Podcasts and give a rating and a review. That is how other people will be able to find this podcast. Gretchen, thank you so much for joining us.

GRETCHEN: You're very welcome.

NATALIE: To the rest of you, fly free.